

Roadmap to Accessibility-Related Sessions

If you're "streaming" in the important new technologies of accessibility this year in Vegas, with apologies for the mixed metaphor, here's your "roadmap."

Sun, 1-1:45 p.m., LS 7, Burgundy/Paris.

"The AccessAbility SIG: Anatomy of a Successful Community." A-SIG co-manager Mike Murray, supported by a panel of SMEs, shares ideas and turnkey tools that have helped the A-SIG grow into an international disabilities advocacy and accessibility organization. If you missed LS 7, you can catch a reprise Tuesday afternoon in UID 8W, below.

Sun, 4-6 p.m., Burgundy/Paris. A-SIG business meeting. Meet the new officers, join up, and help chart our course for 2006-7!

Sun, 7:30-9:30 p.m., Reception, Champagne Ballroom, Paris. Look for the A-SIG and Orlando chapter welcoming tables if you missed a shot at chapter- and SIG-building turnkey tools in LS 5 and LS 7.

Mon, 11 a.m.-Noon, UID 2E, Champagne 1, Paris. "Web 2011—Scenarios for Older Adults Online," Beth Mazur. By 2011, the first Baby Boomer turns 65 and 60 million Boomers are online. Yet, innovations in technology change what "being online" means.

Mon, 12:15-2 p.m., Networking luncheon, Platinum, Bally's. Look for a topic table on accessibility.

Mon, 2-3:30 p.m., UID 3Q, Chablis, Paris. "Communicating with Deaf Users," Suzanna Laurent, Candice McKee, Andrea Zachary. Avoid stumbling blocks that result in miscommunication, and facilitate better communication practices with ?silent? user-readers who are deaf.

Mon, 4-5 p.m., UID 4I, Champagne 1, Paris. "Accessibility and Online Information," Linda E. Roberts, Kathryn Summers. Ensure your online information is accessible to all. Get an overview of the WWW Consortium guidelines and learn how to design online forms for low literacy users.

Tue, 8:30-10 a.m., UID 5Q, Bordeaux, Paris. "Assistive Technology: Strategies for Diverse Needs," Gloria Reece. Learn how experience equity can be achieved for a diverse needs audience by matching products and strategies to a wide variety of needs.

Tue, 11 a.m.-Noon, MG 6P, Bronze 2, Bally's. "Telecommuting/Working with Remote Project Teams," Edward J. Marshall, Jr. Presentation includes work habits, logistical solutions, technologies, and tips to ease difficulties associated with this non-traditional work environment that can help communicators with disabilities practice the profession.

Tue, 11 a.m.-Noon, UID 6U, Bronze 1, Bally's. "Don't Confuse Accessibility and Usability," C. Bradley Dilger, Sushil K. Oswal. Equating usability and accessibility serves none of our audiences; they must be conceptualized separately in writing or product development cycles.

Tue, 12:15-2 p.m., Networking luncheon.

Look for the A-SIG tables!

Tue, 4-5:30 p.m., UID 8W, Rivoli A/B, Paris. "Making the World—and Information Products—More Accessible." A-SIG progression. Table topics:

- ★ "Technical Communicators as Accessibility Advocates": Mak Pandit
- ★ "How to Achieve Optimal Accessibility Via Expert Usability Inspections and Empirical Evaluations": MikePaciello,moderator.
- ★ "Disability Laws and Standards": Melissa Bowman
- ★ "Assistive Technology: Strategies for Diverse Needs": Gloria Reece
- ★ "Ethical Tenets of Legality, Respect, and Fairness in Accessibility": Dan Voss
- ★ "The AccessAbility SIG: Anatomy of a Successful Community": Mike Murray (reprise of LS 7, above)

Wed, 2-3:30 p.m., UID 11P, Champagne 1, Paris. "Make Your Web Site Accessible to All Users," Jocelyn C. Williams and George Slaughter. Learn how to create Web content, including images, accessible both to users with disabilities (visual, auditory, physical, or cognitive) and to those with device limitations. ★

Acknowledgements

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ACHIEVE!

STC AccessAbility SIG

Special Conference Edition

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AccessAbility Special Interest Group



There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask, "why?"...

I dream of things that never were, and ask, "why not?"

-Robert F. Kennedy

7-7-7: Congratulations! You Win This Special Conference Newsletter

Welcome to Las Vegas ... you have already won big-time!

Here, free of charge, is your special edition of *Achieve!*, the AccessAbility SIG newsletter, for the 53rd annual STC international conference! This edition provides you with a comprehensive roadmap to accessibility-related sessions and activities at the conference. It also introduces you to one of STC's newest yet dynamic and enthusiastic special interest groups, and it offers an insightful look at the increasing importance of accessibility in the technical communicator's toolkit in a column by A-SIG member Lisa Pappas.

Originally founded in 1997 as the Special Needs Committee by manager emeritus Judy Skinner, the AccessAbility SIG has grown into a respected international disabilities advocacy organization, including some of the world's leading experts on accessibility.

Contents.

Inside this edition, you will find an overview of the A-SIG's mission, its goals and objectives, its communication media, links to online resources, and some of our accomplishments. ★

People Helping People

The mission of the Society for Technical Communication's AccessAbility SIG, or A-SIG, is threefold:

- 1 Provide resources, information, and support to technical communicators with accessibility needs ★
- 2 Provide resources that help technical communicators make the products they create accessible to users with special needs ★
- 3 Provide strategic leadership in both areas through positive initiatives and open communication, both inside and outside of the Society ★

How Can We Help You?

By identifying products, services, and literature that may be useful to individuals with special needs.

By helping technical writers incorporate accessible features into their online and print documents.

By serving as a clearinghouse to match people with products, services, and relevant literature relating to a variety of accessibility needs.

By promoting ethical practices among professionals in their workplace relationships with individuals with disabilities.

By publishing cutting-edge information on accessibility technologies, online and in STC publications.

By identifying resources that make conferences more accessible (e.g., annual guide).

★Policy Note★

The A-SIG does not diagnose, prescribe, or endorse. We simply provide information to those who want it.

Accessibility: It's Good For People AND Business

Lisa Pappas
STC AccessAbility SIG

Here at the A-SIG, we've built an active and avid community of advocates. Pardon the cliché, but when it comes to accessibility, "fighting the good fight" is simply not enough. As technical communicators, we have long been virtual if not actual team members of the development, testing, and technical support communities. Our analytical minds question and probe to ferret out inconsistencies in procedures, to simplify and clarify them, to find out what happens when the user—gasp!—doesn't follow directions or, and here's the shocker, doesn't read the fine manual (RTFM). Imagine that! This same characteristic of analytical inquisitiveness, as well as the technical writing itself, complements firms' usability and accessibility efforts.

As technical communicators, we empathize with the unfortunate user struggling to install, configure, and use increasingly complex software. Naturally, that empathy includes users with disabilities who have the additional struggle with hardware and software that cannot or will not adapt to their needs.

By making ICT products 508-compliant, we improve the usability for all.

The fact is, accessible computer technology is both the stick and the carrot that we can use to lead reluctant businesses into the world of accessibility in information products. Firms who sell information and computer technology (ICT) products in the U.S. public sector are generally aware of Section 508 of the National Rehabilitation Act of 1998, which requires that Web sites be accessible to users with disabilities. If these firms' revenue from the public sector represents a significant portion of their total revenue, then their product strategists will understand that Section 508 compliance can preserve or expand their Federal market share. That's the carrot. Conversely, failure to comply with Section 508 could cost them that market niche. That's the stick.

What is less well known, except among those of us who hear JAWS in our dreams, is that by making ICT products 508-compliant to make them accessible for users with disabilities, we improve their usability for *all* users. We learned this with physical accessibility when curb cuts were instituted to assist people in wheelchairs. Opponents cited safety concerns, claiming that curb cuts could cause people who do not have mobility restrictions to fall. The last time I was in Washington, D.C. with my roller-bag trailing behind me, those curb cuts made all the difference in my hoofing it to the Metro station on time.

When Web pages are made accessible, with content and presentation separated, they degrade more gracefully from LCD to laptop to PDA. And my over-40 eyes appreciate Web sites that respond to my request for larger fonts than the default lots-of-white-space, 6-point styles.

"Implement accessibility and get better automated testing for free!"

Accessible Web content and software can not only improve overall usability (and who doesn't need that!), it can also facilitate organizations' test efforts. A number of products for automating software tests need accessible attributes to manipulate an interface.

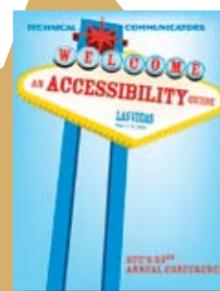
When I advertised an internal course at my workplace for developers about implementing the Java Accessibility API (application programming interface), I used the teaser: "Implement accessibility and get better automated testing for free!" Suddenly, groups who'd thought they lacked the necessary resources to address accessibility found eager students. Those teams found legitimate return on their accessibility investment (ROI) through the number of software anomalies (a.k.a., bugs) found earlier in the cycle when they're cheaper and easier to fix. Automating software tests made broader regression testing possible in later cycles to make sure that nothing got broken when something else got fixed.

Historically, technical communicators are advocates for the end user. For users with disabilities, our advocacy is especially important. By working to make accessible ICT commonplace, we may find that the "end-users with age-related functional impairments" we help may be ourselves. ★

"The A-SIG Listserv gives me access to an entire community of knowledge. It saves me a great deal of time in research."
-Jennifer Selix
Student Member

"As a communicator with disabilities, I know first-hand the importance of technology."
-Judy Skinner
Manager Emeritus

"If not for the A-SIG and its wonderful conference accessibility guides, I wouldn't have been able to attend the last four annual conferences."
-Mike Murray
Orlando Chapter



Need Help? Feel Free to Contact Us!

At press time for this special conference edition, the A-SIG was in the process of electing and appointing its officers for 2006-7. So rather than list the contact information for the outgoing officers, here are three easy ways you can contact us:

- ★ Send an e-mail to our online form: http://www.stcsig.org/sn/webmaster_form.shtml
Your message will be distributed to all current officers at the time you send it, and someone will be in touch with you.
- ★ For a current slate of A-SIG officers and for current contact information, check our web site: <http://www.stcsig.org/sn/>
- ★ Look under SIGs in the STC administrative directory (available to STC community leaders from the STC Office)

Get Your Accessibility Guide!

If you have questions or concerns regarding accessibility at this conference, or if you are interested in the many elements involved in making a major event fully accessible to its attendees, be sure to pick up a copy of the comprehensive Conference Accessibility Guide. They are available in the registration area.

The Guide can also be accessed online at the A-SIG or STC web site and at the conference materials web site. ★

STC Mission:

"Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication."

Check Out These Online Resources!

- ★ Our comprehensive and always growing Web site, at <http://www.stcsig.org/sn/>
- ★ Our archive of data-rich and inspiring newsletters, at <http://www.stcsig.org/sn/newsletter.shtml>
- ★ Our robust and enlightening listserv, at <http://lists.stc.org/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=stc-accessibility>
- ★ Accessibility-related materials from the past six international conferences, at http://www.stcsig.org/sn/conference_session_mater.shtml
- ★ The latest in our series of trail-blazing conference accessibility guides, at <http://www.stc.org/53rdConf/extras/access.guide.asp>

Want to Join Us?

Simplest way is to grab (well, make that accost) one of the AccessAbility SIG members sporting the waycool A-SIG or butterfly lapel pins. We'll give you an A-SIG badge, we'll give you some business cards, we'll give you a lollipop, and we'll set you up with a turnkey SIG sign-up form. We'll probably also fill your ear with excitement and enthusiasm. We tend to do that.

If you somehow miss us, you can simply download the SIG sign-up form from http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files_sigform.pdf.

Trust us, an affiliation with this deeply committed and wonderful bunch of people will enrich your professional life in a way that you cannot possibly imagine. OK, *don't* trust us—try it! ★

A-SIG Communication Media

The A-SIG's three major communications media are outstanding resources on accessibility:

- 🦋 **Web Site.** This award-winning comprehensive online resource provides an efficient system for keyword searches on products, services, and literature on accessibility needs and offers access to searchable databases and archived conference materials.
- 🦋 **Achieve! Newsletter.** This data-rich and beautifully designed publication presents both technical and human sides of accessibility.
- 🦋 **LISTSERV™.** This robust and dynamic real-time forum provides the latest information on accessibility and assistive technologies, helping both communicators and people with special needs.

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